



**U.S. Department of Justice**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Grand Rapids, Michigan – February 14, 2006** – United States Attorney Margaret M.

Chiara and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) Special Agent in Charge Valerie J. Goddard announced that on February 13, 2006, a federal jury sitting in Grand Rapids returned guilty verdicts on criminal charges against Lionel Beard, age 49, of Lansing, Michigan, and Thomas Beard, age 34, also of Lansing. Lionel Beard was convicted of engaging in a continuing criminal enterprise (CCE) and conspiracy to distribute more than a kilogram of heroin. Thomas Beard was convicted of possessing more than 100 grams of crack cocaine and the use of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime. The CCE charge is often referred to as the “Drug Kingpin” law and is among the strongest tools available to hold accountable those who manage, supervise and control large scale drug trafficking organizations. The CCE offense is punishable by a mandatory minimum sentence of at least 20 years in prison. Thomas Beard’s convictions are punishable by a mandatory minimum sentence of at least 15 years in prison. Sentencing dates have not yet been set.

After a two-week trial and one day of deliberations, the jury found Lionel Beard guilty of 13 felony violations of federal law. In addition to the CCE and conspiracy counts, he was also found guilty of multiple counts of delivering heroin and cocaine, three counts of being a felon in

possession of firearms, and a sole count of tampering with a witness after he violently assaulted a cooperating co-defendant last fall.

The jury found Thomas Beard guilty of 8 felony violations of federal law. In addition to possessing crack cocaine and the use of a firearm in furtherance of drug-trafficking, he was found guilty of multiple counts of possession with intent to distribute heroin, cocaine, and crack cocaine, as well as being a felon in possession of eight firearms.

These latest convictions bring to 14 the number of Lansing residents convicted as a result of their participation in a conspiracy that began in the early 1980's and continued through 2005. Most of those persons convicted were either related to, or had close ties to, the family of Lionel Beard and his mother, Elnora Beard. The evidence at trial demonstrated that from as early as 1983 and continuing through September of 2005 there existed a criminal narcotics enterprise that was managed, supervised and controlled by Elnora Beard and, later, by her son, Lionel R. Beard. The organization profited by selling heroin and cocaine to a relatively stable group of heroin addicts in Lansing. The close-knit cadre of long-term addicts and family members made prosecution of the organization very difficult.

Elnora Beard and Lionel R. Beard were assisted in their enterprise by various members of the Beard family, including Elaine Beard, Carolyn Beard, Charleta Beard, Thomas Beard, and Marvin Patton, the father of at least one of Elnora's children. Ralph Thompson, Parrish West, Anthony Duncan, Willie Frazier, Jr., Megan Basey, Brenda Kelley, and Todd Merchant have also been convicted on charges related to the criminal enterprise.

The investigation was assigned to the Organized Crime, Drug Enforcement Task Force during the spring of 2005, when it was presented to federal authorities by the Lansing Police

Department after many years of attempting to fight the organization through street-level interdiction by its Special Investigations Unit. The Task Force has now succeeded in dismantling of one of the longest running criminal enterprises in the history of the Western District of Michigan.

The investigation was conducted by the Lansing Office of ATF, the Lansing Police Department, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. The cases were prosecuted on behalf of the United States of America by Assistant United States Attorneys Mark Courtade and Nils Kessler.

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